



February 7, 2023

Dear Members of the House Judiciary finance and Civil Law Committee,

On behalf of over 10,000 members of the Minnesota Medical Association, I am writing in support of both HF 14 and HF 15. Both universal background checks for firearm sales and transfers and the use of extreme risk protection orders are two steps that are needed to address the epidemic that is caused by firearm death and injury.

Firearm death and injury is a public health crisis, and it is particularly acute among children, adolescents, and young adults. Every day, 22 children are victims of firearm death and injury in the United States. According to the CDC, firearms recently became the number one cause of death for children in the United States, surpassing motor vehicle deaths and those caused by other injuries. We must do better by our children.

Also, we continue to see firearm violence disproportionately and overwhelmingly impact communities of color, with Black Americans experiencing 10 times the firearm homicides and 18 times the firearm injuries.

HF 14 expands the use of criminal background checks for firearm sales. Simply put, background checks work. In Minnesota, 891,044 background checks were conducted in 2022 based on the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) data. While this system has been successful in preventing tens of thousands of firearm sales to individuals prohibited from purchasing guns, an enormous loophole exists. A 2015 report published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* – a widely respected and influential medical journal – found that 22 percent of gun purchases over the course of the previous two years were not subject to background checks. Furthermore, 45% of gun owners who acquired a gun online in the past two years did so without any background checks being conducted. This glaring loophole must be closed.

HF 15 is a common-sense measure would allow family members and law enforcement to petition the courts to remove firearms from individuals who are displaying signs of risk to themselves or others.

While much of the focus around firearms in recent years has been on mass shooting events, the untold story about firearm violence is the alarming and very real link to suicides. Nationwide, most gun deaths—roughly three in five—are suicides. This represents an average of 65 people dying by gun suicide every day. In Minnesota, nearly 69 percent of firearm deaths are suicides.

Studies exploring the link between similar laws and reduced rates of suicide have made clear that these laws work. Indiana's suicide rate declined by 7.5 percent when its extreme risk protection order law took effect. Connecticut's suicide rate declined by 14 percent when enforcement of its law increased. The research makes clear – these laws work to reduce suicide fatalities.

While opponents may argue that this bill will result in individuals who wish to take their own lives would simply find another way to do so. That's not accurate. Suicide attempts by firearms are dramatically more lethal than other means. According to the CDC, in 2014, about 87% of firearm suicide attempts were fatal compared to just 3% of attempts by drug overdoses. Suicide attempts involving firearms are 2.6 times more lethal than the second most lethal suicide method--those involving suffocation. Because suicide is often an impulsive decision, removing firearms from the immediate vicinity of a potential victim can reduce death. When a person is in crisis, loved ones and law enforcement are often the first to see warning signs that he or she poses a threat. Extreme Risk Protective Orders empower family and law enforcement to petition for an order that removes guns from a high-risk situation.

A few years ago, a gun rights organization scolded physicians for our advocacy on behalf of firearm safety measures, urging us to “stay in our lane.” I want to tell you this is very much in our lane. Not only do physicians work to repair the damage to tissue and organs following a gunshot wound, we are also often tasked with being the one to tell family members that their beloved son, mother, or grandfather has died as a result of their wounds. When more than 45,000 Americans die as a result of firearm violence –4,357 of whom were children ages 1-19 – there's no other way to describe it – this is a public health crisis.

I encourage passage of both HF 14 and HF 15.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Will Nicholson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Will Nicholson, MD

President, Minnesota Medical Association